

INJECTION DRUG USERS AND THEIR SEX/NEEDLE-SHARING PARTNERS

What you should know:

- Injection drug use is the second leading cause of HIV transmission and the leading cause of hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection in California.
- Injection drug users (IDUs) continue to be at high risk for HIV and hepatitis infection in California.
- Sharing of contaminated syringes and other injection equipment is linked to 19 percent of all reported AIDS cases in the state.
- California data suggests that over 1,500 new syringe-sharing HIV infections occur annually.
- The link between injection drug use and HIV in California is particularly strong for women and people of color.
- Among adult/adolescent women in California, injection drug use-related risk factors account for 35 percent of cumulative AIDS cases. Forty-six percent of AIDS cases among African American women and 55 percent of AIDS cases among Native American women are associated with injection drug use, compared to 40 percent of AIDS cases among White women.

What we do:

To better address the HIV prevention needs of IDUs and their sex/needle-sharing partners, the California Department of Public Health, Office of AIDS (CDPH/OA) funds both policy work and programs related to the prevention of blood-borne infections among IDUs. These include:

- Providing HCV counseling and testing to IDUs in conjunction with HIV counseling and testing services in local health jurisdictions (LHJs) throughout California. Results of the original demonstration project, which was funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2003, indicated that IDUs are significantly more likely to test for HIV when HCV counseling and testing are also offered.
- Training satellite syringe exchangers (SSEs) as peer educators to provide health education to IDUs. SSEs are IDUs who collect used syringes from their peers, exchange them for new syringes at syringe exchange programs (SEPs), and deliver them back to their peers. The intervention is the first in the nation to formalize the relationship between SSEs and the public health system. Preliminary results indicate that SSEs are eager to take on this role, and this is an effective way to bring harm reduction services to a broader community of IDUs.



- Providing technical assistance to LHJs that are implementing Senate Bill 1159, the bill which permits local governments to authorize sale of syringes without a prescription in pharmacies that opt into the program. The law requires that CDPH convene an evaluation advisory panel comprised of public health experts, law enforcement, pharmacy representatives, and waste management specialists. Together with this advisory panel, CDPH/OA will evaluate the effects of allowing the sale of hypodermic needles or syringes without a prescription, and will submit a report to the Governor and Legislature by January 15, 2010.
- Provide direct funding to ten AIDS service organizations across the state which provide syringe exchange services. Funding was awarded through a competitive bid process.
- Providing technical assistance to LHJs and community-based organizations which wish to add syringe exchange to their HIV prevention services, and assisting SEPs in stabilizing their programs through training and technical assistance in board development, volunteer recruitment and training and strengthening linkages with local law enforcement and treatment providers.

Helpful resources:

- For technical assistance and information about syringe access, contact Alessandra Ross, Injection Drug Use Policy and Program Coordinator at CDPH/OA at (916) 449-5796 or alessandra.ross@cdph.ca.gov.
- For technical assistance for SEPs, contact the Harm Reduction Coalition at (510) 444-6969 or www.harmreduction.org.
- For more information on OA's mission, programs, and other helpful resources, go to www.CDPH.ca.gov/programs/AIDS.
- For information about HIV/AIDS, call the *California HIV/AIDS Hotline* at (800) 367-AIDS (English/Spanish) or (888) 225-AIDS (TDD) or go to www.AIDShotline.org.
- For more information on California statutes. Visit the Official California Legislative Information Web site at www.leginfo.ca.gov.